PALESTINE REFUGEES *today*

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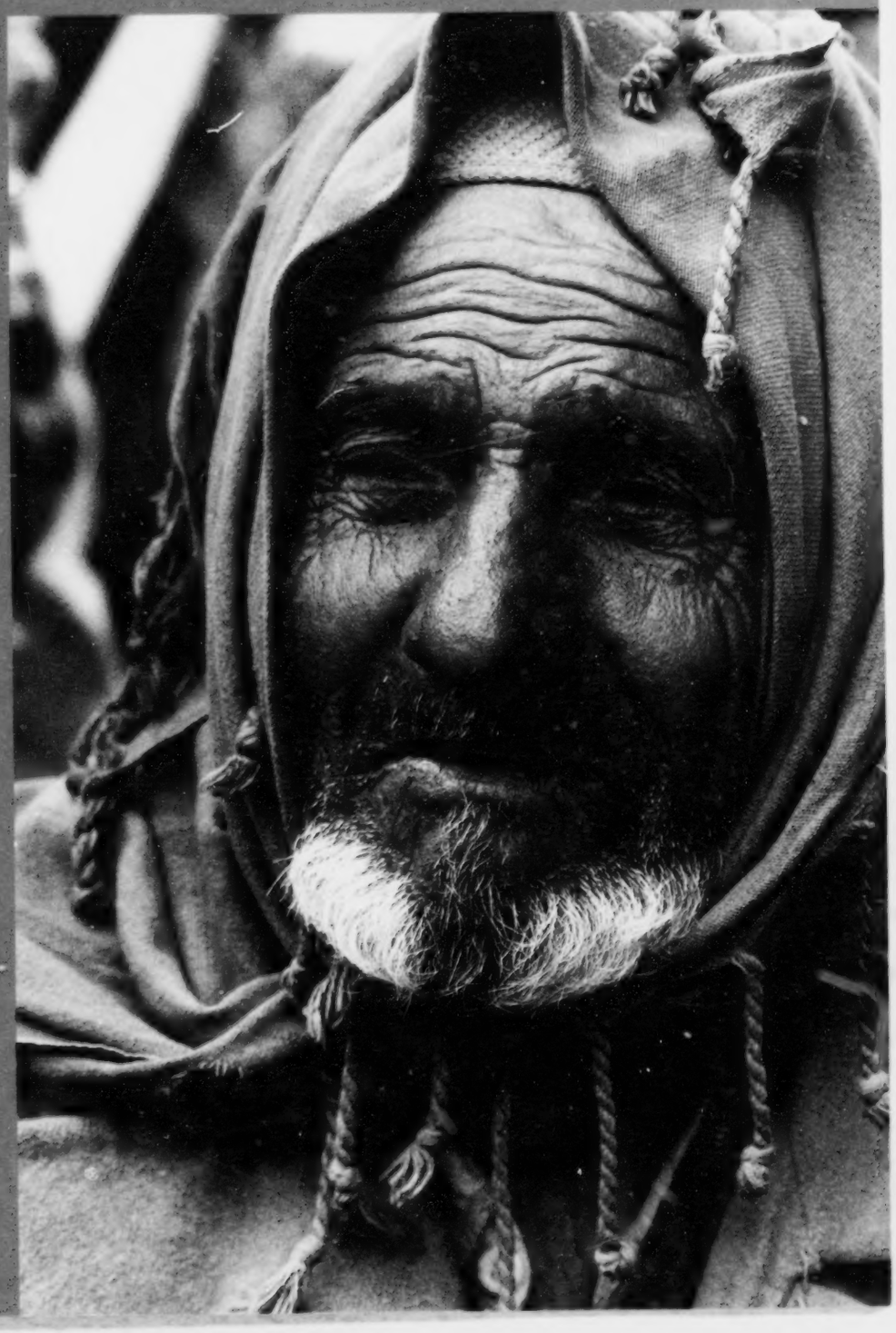

UNRWA
45th anniversary

UNITED NATIONS
50th anniversary

Front Cover:
A refugee in Baqa'a camp, Jordan.
UNRWA photo: George Nehmeh

Inside Cover:
Losing her tent in the winter storms of February 1969 was another tragedy for this displaced Palestine refugee.
UNRWA photo: Munir Nasr

TO OUR READERS

To mark the 45th anniversary of UNRWA, which coincides with the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, we are publishing two special issues of *Palestine Refugees Today*, presenting a retrospective of the historical events which marked, in such a dramatic way, the life of the Palestinian people, and an overview of the vital role the Agency played in helping them to maintain their identity.

The images we gathered for this first issue almost need no comment. They bring us back to the painful and hungry days of a people who lost their land, their homes and their possessions, but never their dignity or their hope. As the Commissioner-General says in the interview which opens this issue of the magazine, "During these 45 years the Agency was associated with all the agonies and crises which the Palestinian people have seen, and whatever the extent of these crises and the danger of operating under such circumstances, UNRWA was always present in support of the Palestine refugees."

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UNRWA: 45 years of service to Palestine refugees

UNRWA started operating in 1950 as a temporary agency to deliver emergency relief aid to Palestine refugees. To mark UNRWA's 45th anniversary, Commissioner-General Ilter Türkmen gave an interview to Palestine Refugees Today. *The following is a transcript:*

Q: What has UNRWA meant, in your view, to Palestine refugees?

A: UNRWA has been associated with the Palestine refugees for 45 years. It was created in the beginning as an organization to deliver urgently-needed humanitarian assistance and to create employment through public works. This is why the word "Works" is in the title of UNRWA. It soon became apparent that it was impossible to carry out significant public works and UNRWA decided very wisely to invest in human resource development through education and health. Perhaps the greatest success of the Agency has been in these two fields.

Despite the upheaval in camps and in villages and towns where the refugees live, UNRWA has helped the refugees to maintain a reasonable level of health, concentrating on basic services such as mother-and-child care and immunization.

In the field of education, UNRWA was able to provide for young Palestine refugees an education cycle of nine years and also vocational training. Many of the graduates of the schools and of our centres have been extremely successful in their lives. They went to the Gulf countries where they earned a good income and had distinguished careers.

Throughout these years, UNRWA, of course, never neglected its relief activities. It was associated with all the agonies and crises which the Palestinian people have seen throughout the years - the Israeli-Arab wars, the Lebanese civil war etc. - and we can say with pride that, whatever the extent of the crises, whatever the extent of the danger of operating under such circumstances, UNRWA was always present in support of the Palestine refugees.

In short, UNRWA has played a vital role in keeping the refugees healthy, keeping the refugees educated, helping them to keep their identity and reinforcing their life as a community.

Q: In your message to UNRWA staff to mark the start of 1995 you mentioned that the "winds of change" were blowing in the area in which the Agency operates. You also spoke of the "difficulties of a transition period" and the "transformation" that this would involve - both for the Agency and for your staff. Could you elaborate on this?

A: UNRWA's mandate has been from the very beginning limited in time - renewed every three years by the General Assembly - and the reason is that the Agency will have one day to stop its activities when the refugee problem is resolved. It is for the first time that we see the possibility of a comprehensive solution in the Middle East which would include a settlement of the refugee problem as well.

UNRWA should establish a five-year time horizon

The agreements between Palestinians and Israelis foresee that negotiations will start during the five-year interim period to resolve the refugee issue. There are also references to this problem in the peace agreement between Jordan and Israel.

It is, therefore, normal for UNRWA to begin to consider the consequences of the peace process for the Agency's future. Our approach has been simple. We have based ourselves on the logic of the Declaration of Principles between Palestinians and Israelis of 13 September 1993.

This Declaration has established a five-year transition period. We, therefore, say that UNRWA should establish a five-year time horizon, make projections of expenditure for these five years, set its priorities and present to the donor countries the financial requirements for this period.

Since there are no guarantees that during the five-year period a solution will be found to the refugee problem, it would be wise to re-examine the situation in three years' time and to see whether the five-year assumption is still valid. Such a concept will be helpful, we thought, for the Agency, for its planning and also for the donor countries.

It will involve for donor countries an increasing level of contributions per year to take account of demographic growth and also of expenses associated with the eventual phasing-out of the Agency. We hope that the donor countries will adopt this concept and commit themselves to funding the Agency according to the plan we are going to present to them.

If not, the Agency will feel compelled to reduce its services and certainly this will send the wrong signal. The refugees will ask themselves how they can be deprived of the traditional services of UNRWA at a time when the international community is speaking of supporting this peace process through economic and social development. They will feel that the peace process has passed them by. And I would like to hope that the donor countries will fully understand the importance of funding UNRWA regularly and adequately throughout the five-year period.

Q: In the same message, you also said that the destiny of the Palestine refugees was not yet clear and that adverse social and economic circumstances had affected the living conditions of UNRWA staff - most of whom are themselves refugees. What is the situation today?

A: It is true that staff salaries have suffered from the budgetary deficit of UNRWA and we are ready to present in the five year projections the expenditures needed to improve to a reasonable degree the living conditions of our staff.

The Middle East is going through a transformation which is affecting substantially the economic and social environment. UNRWA will have to adapt to these changes. If, as a result of these changes, the salaries paid by governments increase, the salaries of UNRWA should keep pace with them. This is what we will try to do.

Q: You introduced the concept of a five-year horizon for UNRWA in your address to the Special Political and De-Colonisation Committee in November 1994. What would be the purpose and implications of such a horizon?

A: It is a new concept, a new approach. I believe it is consistent with the political realities of the move towards peace. It doesn't mean that UNRWA will suddenly, automatically, come to an end in five years' time. This will depend on the progress of the negotiations on refugees, on the policies of governments and on the extent to which donor countries would like to continue funding the Agency. But, instead of having the same discussions year after year on the extent of UNRWA's budget and its relevance to developments in the Middle East, it would be much better to have a longer-term view. This will be preferable for the refugees and also for our staff.

Q: In response to the signing of the Declaration of Principles and the Cairo Agreement by the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel, UNRWA has established the Peace Implementation Programme (PIP). What was the concept behind PIP and are we achieving our goals?

It is a new concept... consistent with the political realities

A: PIP is part of the general programme of the United Nations to support the peace process, economically and socially. The first phase of PIP has been extremely successful because UNRWA was the only organization capable of rapidly presenting and implementing projects. We have now presented to the donor countries the second phase of PIP which we hope will receive the same kind of support. PIP means not only the creation of jobs for Palestinians but also a sustained effort to update the infrastructure of UNRWA in the five-year period so that when the time comes to finally hand over our responsibilities to the Palestinian Authority and to host governments, we will transfer good institutions and a good infrastructure.

Q: Is PIP also envisaged for Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic and what future role do you see for the Agency's work in these three countries?

A: PIP is not limited to the West Bank and Gaza. It encompasses Syria, Jordan and Lebanon as well and UNRWA has insisted from the very beginning that the refugees in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan should benefit from the peace process. Unfortunately, some of our projects in those countries are encountering difficulties but we hope to resolve them.

Q: What challenges do you foresee, both with regard to the Agency's financial deficit and its ability to operate in the changing political climate?

The future role of the Agency will depend on the political evolution

A: The operations of UNRWA have always depended on the goodwill of the host countries. Therefore, our relations with the host countries are extremely important. We now have a new situation in which the Palestinian Authority has assumed responsibilities for health and education and relief and social welfare not only in Gaza but also throughout the West Bank.

We have to cooperate very closely with the Palestinian Authority and with sister Palestinian institutions and bodies as much as possible. We are very happy with the degree of cooperation we have achieved so far and thankful to the Palestinian Authority for the trust and confidence it has shown in UNRWA.

Q: You recently opened the Gaza Headquarters of UNRWA as an initial move towards transferring Headquarters from Vienna to Gaza. What is the situation with regard to the transfer?

A: We are at the stage of planning and implementing the transfer. There would be a nucleus of Headquarters staff by the end of March or April 1995. The move of the bulk of the Headquarters staff from Vienna to Gaza is at the planning stage. The implementation of the plan requires, of course, additional financing. We are doing our best to ensure that when financing is available there would be no delays because of a lack of administrative and logistical preparations.

Q: What role do you envisage for the Agency in the immediate future, bearing in mind the gradual hand-over of responsibilities to the Palestinian Authority in Gaza and Jericho?

A: The future role of the Agency will depend on the political evolution and the progress achieved in negotiating a settlement of the refugee problem. For the refugees, there is a great sense of concern and apprehension about their future. It is of vital humanitarian and political importance that the agreements and peace treaties that are still to be negotiated do not pass them by. But UNRWA is not involved in the politics of this issue. UNRWA is trying to the best of its ability to perform its humanitarian and developmental task. The Agency will continue to accompany the Palestine refugees on their difficult journey until such time as there is a permanent solution to their plight.

UNRWA Commissioner-General Ilter Turkmen (centre) visiting Shatila camp, Lebanon
UNRWA photo

Memories of the early years

Life for Palestine refugees was tough in the 1950s. Veteran employees of UNRWA recall events during those first formative years of the Agency.

"In the early years, some people didn't have enough money to buy flour, but carrots were very cheap. Since many people thought it shameful to accept UNRWA's rations in those days, carrots were the main diet for poorer families. You could see the children munching them on the street," recalls Ahmad Hillis, now UNRWA's Chief of Education in Gaza.

People sold doors and window frames to raise money

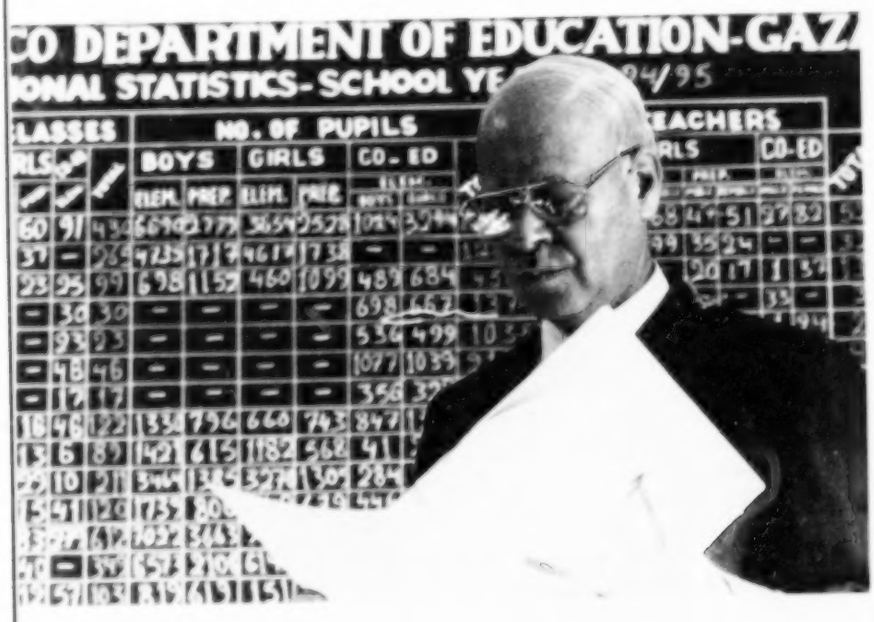
UNRWA employees in Gaza were sometimes paid in kind. "Our salaries were in fish, figs grapes, peanuts and rice, not cash," says Lily Zahi Saba, a teacher in Gaza. There were no textbooks or syllabus. Some teachers used the canvas side of the tent as a blackboard. The children used discarded bags to write on and some used stones as seats. "The tents were like ovens in the summertime. Some teachers were younger than their pupils," she remembers.

"The tents were like ovens in the summer-time."

UNRWA's first annual report records that the majority of men employed on the Agency's road-building projects had no shoes and that refugees often cut up blankets and tent flies for clothing. People living in houses sold doors and window frames to raise a little money.

A cluster of tents

The first UNRWA health clinic in Aqabat Jabr refugee camp in the arid Jordan Valley was simply a cluster of six tents. "We had separate tents for reception, the doctor, dressings, the eye clinic, pediatrics and the pharmacy. In the mornings some of the same tents were used as schools," Yusuf Abu Laban recalls. Yusuf, who retired recently in Jordan, began work as an assistant pharmacist for the Agency on its first day of operation, 1 May 1950. The Palestinian passion for education was high even in the early days, says Ahmad Hillis. "People saw education as the only way out." Mohammad Sayyad, who joined the Agency in 1954 and still teaches mathematics at an UNRWA school in East Jerusalem, recalls that children were so eager to learn that "they would walk barefoot for five kilometres to get to school."



Ahmad Hillis, UNRWA's Chief of Education in Gaza.
UNRWA photo: Munir Nasr

Early priorities

In its early days, UNRWA's top priorities were food, shelter and relief. By the early 1960s, when the most urgent needs for shelter and food were met, the Agency gradually shifted its priorities to education and health. In 1994/95, about 47 per cent of UNRWA's overall budget is devoted to education, with almost 21 per cent allocated to essential health services. The Agency's staff, nearly 6,000 in June 1951, has increased to about 20,000 employed today. This rise is in line with the increase in the number of registered refugees. Just under one million were registered in May 1950; today over three million Palestine refugees are registered with the Agency. The percentage of Palestine refugees living in camps today is virtually the same as it was in 1950 - about one-third. The other

two-thirds are scattered among towns and villages in the host countries.

Setting up in Jerusalem

Soon after UNRWA began its operations in Jerusalem, its headquarters were relocated to the Indian Hospice in the walls of the Old City, now the site of an UNRWA health clinic. In 1953, the office was moved to Orient House, later used as a meeting point for Palestinian officials. In 1954, the office moved again - to the former British Army headquarters in East Jerusalem, where it remains today.

"Children would walk barefoot to get to school"

Hind Naser, now UNRWA's Legal Assistant in the West Bank, moved to the Indian Hospice not long after her family fled their home in West Jerusalem in 1948. While still going to school, she helped to distribute food to other refugees at the Hospice. Naser became UNRWA's first local employee in the West Bank, interviewing refugees who were applying for ration cards.

Improving the camps

Later, Naser commuted to Amman where she helped supervise the construction of the first shelters for refugees in Amman New Camp near Amman. "No one had running water or toilets; there were only water points and movable latrines."

Naser quietly recalls that in the early days she found a key in the pocket of her mother's traditional Palestinian dress. "It's the key to our old house in West Jerusalem," her mother told her. The key stayed in her dress pocket for over 35 years. Finally one day in 1983, Naser returned with her mother to their old homestead. After a tense conversation with the person living there, her mother placed the treasured key on the old doorstep - and walked away. A few months later, her mother died.

UNRWA's first local employee in the West Bank

"We always loved the children"

The key stayed in her dress pocket for over 35 years

Elias Azzam has been an English teacher in Gaza since 1954. He has taught the children and grandchildren of his original students. Many of his former students are now teaching colleagues. One day, Azzam remembers, a youngster he reprimanded in class reported the incident to his father, only to be told: "Azzam was my teacher too. He's a good one and you should obey him." Azzam's eyes sparkle as he says, "You see, we always loved the kids. They're like our own children."

Hind Naser,
UNRWA 's first local employee
in the West Bank.
UNRWA photo: George Nehmeh

"It's not paradise, but it's home"

When thousands of Palestinian policemen, civil servants and their families returned to Gaza and Jericho in 1994, Palestine Refugees Today *wanted to discover what life had been like for these Palestinians who had lived outside their homeland for so long. One refugee born in Gaza, who returned home after 24 years away, recounts a few episodes from his life.*

Sitting in his brother's home on the outskirts of Jabalia camp, Talal and his family are waiting - again. Talal is currently waiting for a job to open up as a civil servant in the Palestinian Authority. But he's used to waiting. He's done a lot of waiting in his life.

Hard times in Gaza

Before Talal's family fled their home during the 1948 hostilities, they had been farmers in Breir village only a few kilometres east of Gaza. They took refuge in a stable in the Zeitoun area of Gaza town for six years before moving to a shelter in Jabalia refugee camp in 1954.

"Life was very hard in those days," he recalls. "I thought the entire world was just like Jabalia camp." He remembers going to the UNRWA school there. "The teachers inspected all of us for clean fingernails and a handkerchief every day. Since some of us couldn't afford a handkerchief, we would secretly toss them to another in the inspection line." To earn a bit of extra cash for his family, Talal began rolling tobacco when he was nine. He also picked oranges and pruned and irrigated the orange groves scattered throughout Gaza. Without land to farm, his father sold food and tea in the local market. "The UNRWA rations were our main source of food," says Talal.

To earn extra cash for the family, Talal began rolling tobacco when he was nine

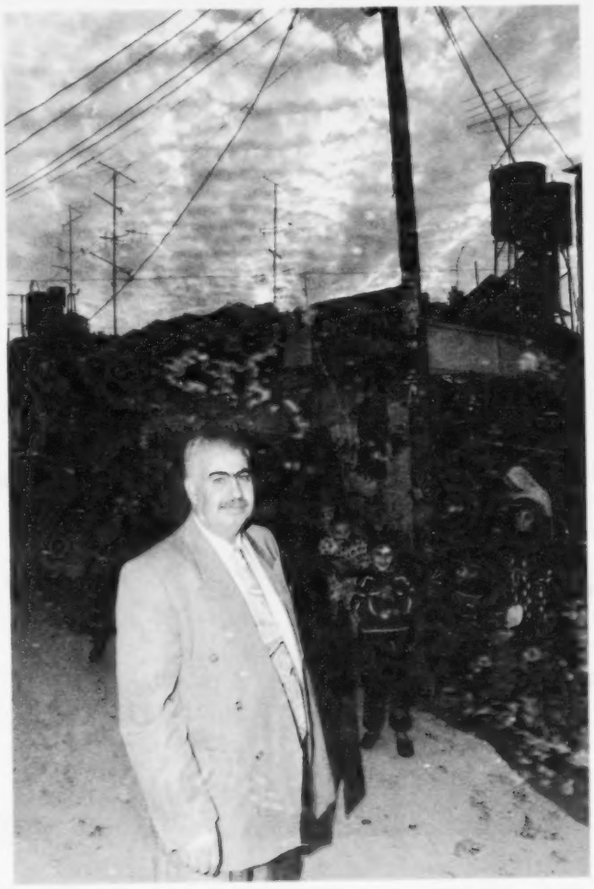
Talal recalls the brief occupation of the Gaza Strip by Israel in 1956. "We heard the bombing begin in the night. Only one family in our area had a radio, so we all crowded around it every evening on the ground to hear the latest news." Eleven years later, Talal was seventeen and doing well in school when he looked up one morning to see Israeli planes flying low and fast to the south. The 1967 war had begun. "A couple of days later, I went with my cousin to see if other members of our family living in Gaza town were all right." On the way they heard tanks which they thought were shelling the camp. They spent three days hiding in the orange groves, not knowing which way to turn. Finally, exhausted, they returned to Jabalia - and found that their relatives were safe.

Leaving home

Talal finished his schooling in Israeli-occupied Gaza and decided to study English literature in Egypt. After only five months there, he travelled to Jordan in September 1970. After several months of uncertainty in Jordan, he moved to Iraq where he finally was able to attend university. He finished with a good degree, but times were hard. "Although a lot of the local Iraqi people helped us, we were very hungry. We lived on bread for most of the time."

They spent three days in the orange groves, not knowing which way to turn

After graduation, Talal was appointed as the representative of a faction of the PLO in



Talal outside his former shelter in Jabalia camp, Gaza.
UNRWA photo: Munir Nasr

Iraq and married a Palestinian woman whose family had fled to Iraq in 1948. Several years later, he got a telephone call from the local PLO office in Baghdad, "Are you Talal? Your mother is waiting for you." It was a brief, joyous reunion with his mother whom he had not seen since he had left Gaza in 1970.

Talal continued his nomadic life

Talal continued his nomadic life. In 1978, he moved to Aden and on to Lebanon in 1981. When the PLO was forced to leave Lebanon in 1982, Talal and his colleagues left the harbour near Beirut on an old freight ship. He travelled on to Damascus, then to Algeria and finally back to Damascus, where he edited an English language magazine.

A telephone call

One night last year in Damascus as he was relaxing with friends, his son burst in with news that PLO Headquarters (then still in Tunis) had selected Talal to return to Gaza as a civil servant. "Even though it was nearly two in the morning, I called Tunis immediately. I had to hear the news for myself." He arrived at the Rafah terminal in Egypt on 24 July but, along with four others, he was not permitted to cross into Gaza. He and the others slept in the mosque on the Egyptian side of the border for three months before he received a birthday present on 27 October - final approval to enter Gaza.

"I was shocked when I first came back."

"Like a distant dream"

"I was shocked when I first came back. I expected to see a clean place, but it's not. Nothing was done to improve the infrastructure," says Talal. "The children challenge everything these days, although things are better because of the educational system."

Talal sits back in his chair, looking into the distance. "It was like a distant dream to return to Gaza after all these years. Even though I have nothing, I feel safe now. This isn't paradise, but it's my homeland."

Jabalia camp (population 75,000), one of eight camps in Gaza.
UNRWA photo: George Nehmeh

45 years: a photographic retrospective

FOREWORD

"The war in Palestine added to an area that formerly supported five million persons the crushing burden of a million Arab refugees. Some of these Palestinians brought with them enough to live on or to establish themselves in the host countries, but over 800,000 were virtually destitute. At the beginning they were assisted by both public and private generosity but, in an area where there is little margin between subsistence and starvation, and no store of wealth to fall back upon if things go wrong, a million extra mouths is too big a burden to be borne for very long.

Since the end of 1948, needy refugees, who have lost both their homes and their livelihood as a result of hostilities in Palestine, have existed principally on relief provided by the United Nations, supplemented by private contributions from all over the world."

Annual Report of Director of UNRWA June 1951

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The above words are taken directly from UNRWA's first annual report covering 1 May 1950 to 30 June 1951.
Today, as UNRWA prepares to mark 45 years of providing education, health, relief and social services to the Palestine refugees, those same refugees are still awaiting a political solution to their plight.
In these pages, we invite you to see how they have lived and to read the story in their faces. Later in the year, we shall be publishing more of these remarkable images, both in our next issue and in a special album to mark the Agency's anniversary.

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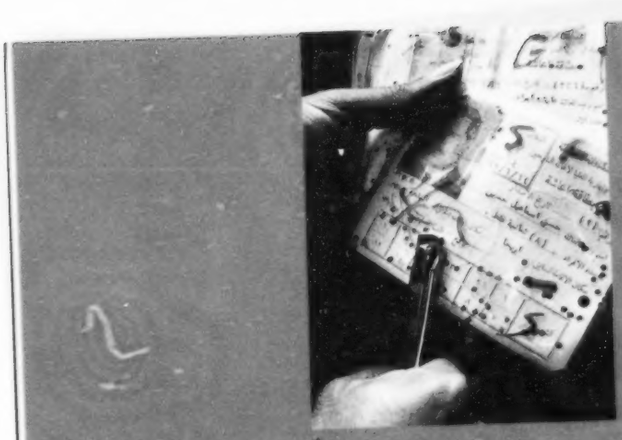
1 1948: The exodus. Arabs being evacuated from northern Palestine.
UN photo

2 1952: Nahr-el-Bared camp for Palestine refugees near Tripoli, Lebanon.
UNRWA photo

3 Bethlehem, 1954: Sorting clothes collected in the United States by the Pontifical Mission for the Arab Refugees.
UNRWA photo



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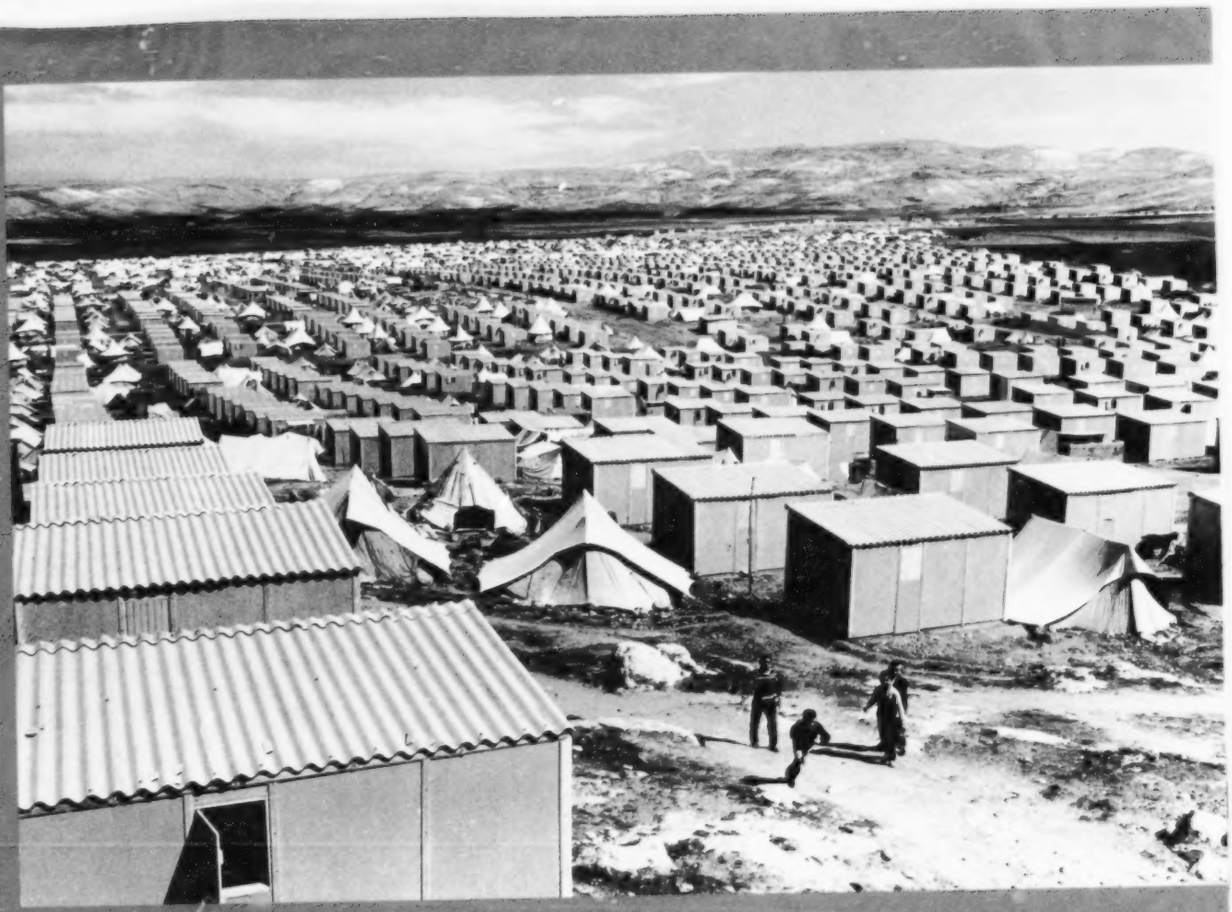

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4 UNRWA registration card
UNRWA photo

5 A Palestine refugee busy dyeing wool - one of UNRWA's works projects from the early years.
UNRWA photo

6 During and in the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967, more than 400,000 Palestinians fled from the West Bank and Gaza Strip eastwards over the River Jordan via the demolished Allenby Bridge.
UNRWA photo: George Nehmeh

7 Baqa'a camp, north Amman, 1968. Refugees who fled war in 1967 were still living in tents.
UNRWA photo: Munir Nasr

8 1969: New shelters for Baqa'a emergency camp, East Jordan.
UNRWA photo: George Nehmeh

9 A Palestine refugee mother bringing her sick child for help from UNRWA , Amman, Jordan.
UNRWA photo

10 Ration distribution at Rafah camp, Gaza Strip, 1969.
UNRWA photo

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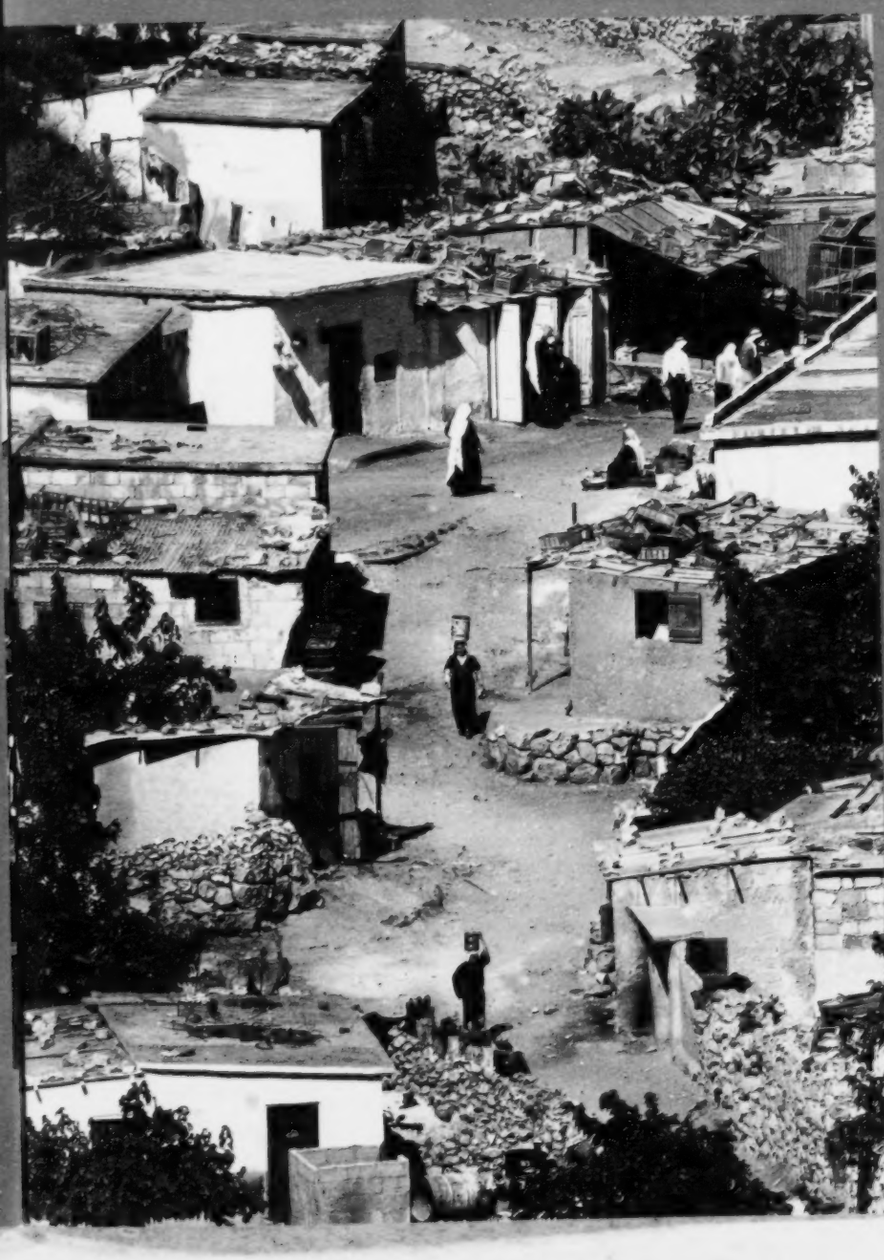

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11 Learning amidst the ruins of their school, Shatila camp, Beirut, Lebanon, 1985.
UNRWA photo

12 Struggling to build up strength: a refugee at an UNRWA supplementary feeding sub-centre in Rafah camp, Gaza.
UNRWA photo

13 Amid the destruction of Ein el Hilweh camp, an UNRWA tanker brings water to Palestine refugees in the summer of 1982.
UNRWA photo: Munir Nasr

14 1982: El Buss camp, Tyre, Lebanon. Her home destroyed and two sons missing.
UNRWA photo: George Nehmeh

15 Children tramp to school through the mud in Baqa'a camp, Jordan, 1975.
UNRWA photo: Munir Nasr

16 Saving lives at UNRWA's rehydration/nutrition centre, Rafah camp, Gaza, 1976.
UNRWA photo: Munir Nasr

17 Three pupils to a book: Beach camp, Gaza Strip, 1965.
UNRWA photo

18 Dheisheh camp, Bethlehem, West Bank, 1973.
UNRWA photo

Headlines in history

UNRWA's magazine Palestine Refugees Today *started out as a 12-page newsletter in November 1960, ten years after the Agency first began services to refugees. In a short introduction, the Director of UNRWA said the publication aimed to "contribute to securing wider public understanding of the problems of the refugees and support for the humanitarian role of UNRWA."*

Leafing through archive copies of the magazine, the reader gains a vivid picture both of the lives refugees have led and of the valuable work the Agency has been doing over the years - as the following extracts illustrate.

From dust to canvas

Shafiq Radwan still remembers the days when he used to squat in the dust and draw, using a stick for his pencil and the sand of the road for his paper.

For in the crowded refugee camps of the Gaza Strip, pencils and paper were often too valuable to be used just for scribbling.

Shafiq was a talented young artist, living in a world of poverty where talent often goes unnoticed.

But, with the help of plenty of perseverance, a little luck, and a boost from UNRWA [a scholarship], Shafiq has exchanged his stick for brushes, the sand for a canvas on an easel, and the dusty road for a studio in Cairo's Higher Institute of Arts. Shafiq, now 18, is a student at one of the United Arab Republic's foremost art colleges....

Palestine Refugees Today No. 16
May 1962

The littlest school

The children in UNRWA's littlest school go to class in their pyjamas. And after class many of them trot right back to bed. The school is a tiny one-room building in the middle of a hospital.

The pupils, ranging in age from six to ten, all have tuberculosis.

The school, the smallest in UNRWA's education system, is in the Tuberculosis Hospital in Bureij refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. The hospital is operated jointly by UNRWA and the Government Authorities in the Gaza Strip, providing 250 beds for serious TB cases.

Palestine Refugees Today No. 27
Aug.-Sept. 1963

Operation waterlift

UNRWA's little fleet of 22 blue water tankers in Jordan circled the globe 11 times last year -- if you tally up the distance -- carrying water to thirsty refugees all over that country...

Carrying water to the Bethlehem-Hebron camps was UNRWA's biggest water-carrying job -- and biggest headache. The tortuous narrow road, which climbs and plunges following what used to be a narrow donkey trail, took a heavy toll on the five tankers working around the clock during the three critical months of September, October and November...

But obstacles aside, from last April to 1 January, at a cost of $100,000, UNRWA has delivered 122,810 tons of water -- enough to float three battleships -- throughout Jordan. This included their total supply to some 35,000 refugees during the worst of the water shortage...

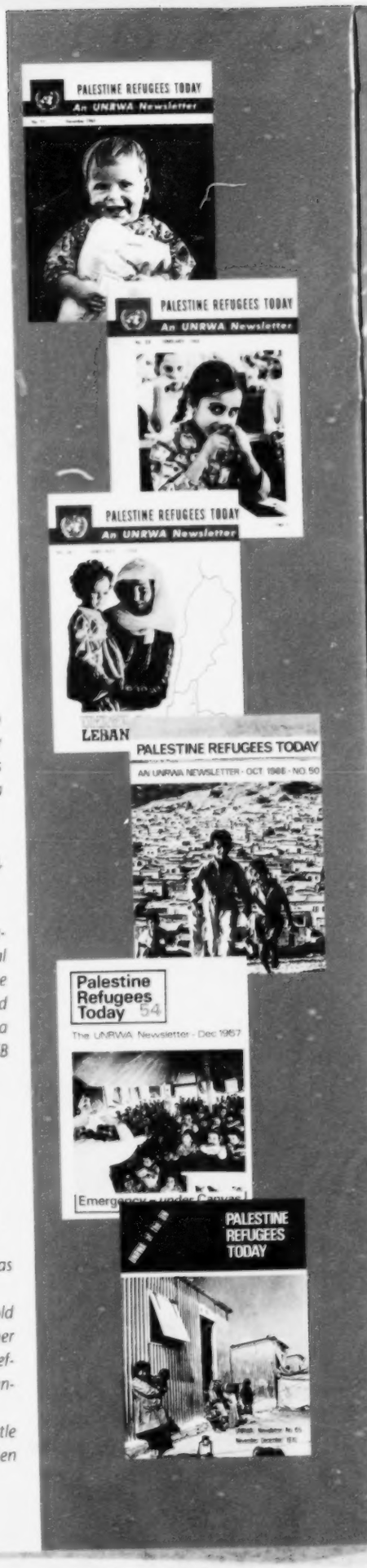
Palestine Refugees Today No. 4
February 1961

Winter comes, and Nawal is alive

Nawal Deeb Mohammad's first summer was almost her last.

Now a robust, healthy 10-month-old baby, she plays happily in the yard of her family's mud-brick hut in Aqabat Jabr refugee camp in the Jordan Valley, near the ancient city of Jericho.

A few months ago, Nawal was little more than a skeleton -- wasted, shrunken



NEWSLETTER No. 82
Palestine Refugees Today
A ONU SEM FUNDOS PARA OS PALESTINIANOS
Palestine Refugees Today
Palestine Refugees Today
UNRWA and the Palestine refugees: the third decade

and fast approaching death. She was a victim of gastro-enteritis, the number-one baby-killer among the refugee population.

Nawal's life was saved in a small white-washed building in the middle of the camp -- the UNRWA rehydration/nutrition centre which gives emergency treatment to infants who have severe gastro-enteritis.

Palestine Refugees Today No. 45
Nov.- Dec. 1965

Emergency conditions in temporary camps in Syria

The deteriorating situation in the tented emergency camps for displaced refugees in Syria is now causing UNRWA severe concern.

The 10,000 Palestinians who live in these camps left their homes when Israeli forces occupied the Golan Heights and the surrounding area in southern Syria in June 1967.

The first bitterly cold winter of 1967-68 (when temperatures were at times lower in Damascus than in Moscow) saw the refugees in makeshift accommodation or in tents in emergency camps which had been hastily established during the summer and the fall. In the course of the second and third stormy winters, heavy rains repeatedly flooded the camps. With funds provided by NEED, the tents in the four UNRWA-administered camps at Sbeineh, Dera'a, Qabr Essit and Jarmana were "winterized" in early 1968 by UNRWA, through the installation of concrete floors and low skirting walls and the provision of tent covers...

Palestine Refugees Today No.63
Feb.- April 1970

UNRWA on the move

White or blue station wagons, with "UNRWA" stencilled in large letters on the roof and sides, roll to a halt every day of the week, every week of the year, at Middle Eastern borders or ceasefire lines. These vehicles are a reminder of UNRWA's special international status in a war area, a status which enables the Agency to assist 1.5 million Palestine refugees living in three countries and two occupied territories.

To maintain communication and move supplies between the five "fields of operations", UNRWA mobilizes many facilities -- the United Nations radio network, a fleet of blue UNRWA trucks, a railroad and commercial aircraft. At present the fastest and most secure method of moving Agency staff and mail is by the "couriers" -- station wagons which circulate between UNRWA Headquarters in Beirut and the Agency's field offices in Syria, Jordan and the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip areas.

Palestine Refugees Today No. 72
April-May-June 1972

Lebanon: Autumn 1982

Bombs were still going off in Beirut late in October, detonated by bomb disposal squads. An explosion and a rush of warm, heavy air: windows rattle, a puff of white smoke and a thin cloud of dust settling gradually.

In the ruined camps of south Lebanon, bulldozers were still turning up unexploded shells....

Families are helping with the clean-up. Women and children are seen on the top of piles of concrete that once were their homes, salvaging concrete blocks.

In El Buss camp, Tyre, a number of families have already rebuilt their homes. Old men, women and even children mix mortar and lay concrete blocks. Most of the clearing is now finished and sites for tents are being marked out by UNRWA staff.

Palestine Refugees Today No. 101
January 1983

Coping under curfew

The children are bored and impatient after a month of being under virtual "house arrest", together with all the other 700,000 Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip. Six-year-old Khaled caused excitement the other day by drinking some kerosene in the hope of making himself sick so he could at least get out of the house by having to be taken to the clinic....

Shortly after the curfew was clamped on the entire Gaza Strip, Mervat's family received a 50-kilogram bag of flour and three kilos of skim milk when UNRWA began an emergency distribution to needy families. The flour goes for baking bread.

Palestine Refugees Today No. 129
April 1991

Building for the future

UNRWA's Peace Implementation Programme is creating jobs and making an impact on the lives of Palestinians by building up local infrastructure, especially in Gaza and the West Bank.

A group of Palestinian men are busy with a digger, building a wall to stop the Mediterranean Sea from eroding land in the crowded Gaza Strip. Elsewhere in Gaza, Palestinians are involved in constructing the badly-needed European Union-UNRWA General Hospital. In the West Bank, Palestine refugees are employed on UNRWA projects - upgrading health centres, painting schools, repairing shelters or even setting up their own businesses.

These are all signs that UNRWA's Peace Implementation Programme (PIP), launched in October 1993 and now in its second phase, is moving ahead - investing in the peace process by improving living conditions and creating employment for Palestine refugees.

PIP aims to improve the basic physical and social services infrastructure, particularly in those sectors where UNRWA is already playing a significant role, such as education, health and environmental health, relief and social services, and income generation. Although many of the projects are for the Gaza Strip and West Bank, the Agency is keen to ensure that Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic also benefit from PIP. Projects are being implemented for all these fields.

The Agency opened its 45th year by reporting progress made in implementing projects in the West Bank and Gaza, using a $20 million contribution given by the Saudi Fund for Development, via PIP, "to assist the Palestinian people." The contribution was the largest for PIP from a single donor.

In Gaza, the Saudi funds are allocated for five new UNRWA schools and for upgrading shelters and health services for refugees. In the West Bank, the funds are being used to upgrade four health centres and nine UNRWA schools, to construct and equip five Agency schools and a polyclinic and to support health institutions in Jerusalem.

UNRWA has formulated its PIP projects in close consultation with the Palestinian leadership and in conformity with the recommendations of the World Bank. Regular consultations with all concerned parties continue as the Palestinian Authority gradually takes over tasks and responsibilities which had previously been under the Israeli authority. The role of UNRWA and the nature of its assistance will undoubtedly change, but in the initial phase of the interim period, UNRWA has been called upon as a vital UN agency with a presence on the ground in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to take on a range of functions.

Job creation

Creating short-term jobs for Palestinians is one of the main aims of PIP. The Agency has been particularly successful in doing so with its PIP projects in the fields of education, shelter rehabilitation and environmental health (which is featured overleaf). As a result of PIP, some Palestine refugees have gained work directly with the Agency, others with outside contractors and suppliers of building materials.

PIP has created employment for a wide range of people - from design engineers to unskilled labourers. Particularly In the Gaza Strip, UNRWA is employing a number of unskilled workers in its projects.

With PIP II, introduced in late 1994, UNRWA has been focusing on projects which are both short-term, labour-intensive and developmentally sustainable in the long-term. The Agency is in close contact with the International Labour Organization to review its PIP II projects with an eye to enhancing their labour intensity.

In the education sector, every school under construction creates approximately 25 to 30 jobs for a period of nine to 12 months in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. Every contract to carry out comprehensive maintenance on a school involves the employment of some 30 labourers for two to six months.

In the field of shelter rehabilitation, each shelter requires an average of three labourers for a period of six weeks in the Gaza Strip. The Agency has upgraded or repaired 1,000 shelters under PIP I in Gaza. In the West Bank, this number is close to 2,000 shelters.

PIP at a glance

- Peace Implementation Programme -
- an UNRWA initiative
- launched soon after the September 1993 Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles to support the peace process by rapidly improving living conditions of Palestine refugees.
- PIP I received $83 million of funding for projects in the West Bank, Jericho and Gaza Strip and $10 million for Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic.
- PIP II consists of $250 million worth of projects in all five fields.
- All projects to be implemented within two years upon receipt of funding; many already underway.
- Projects range from a metal workshop by Palestinians to the European Union-UNRWA hospital in Gaza.

Donors to PIP

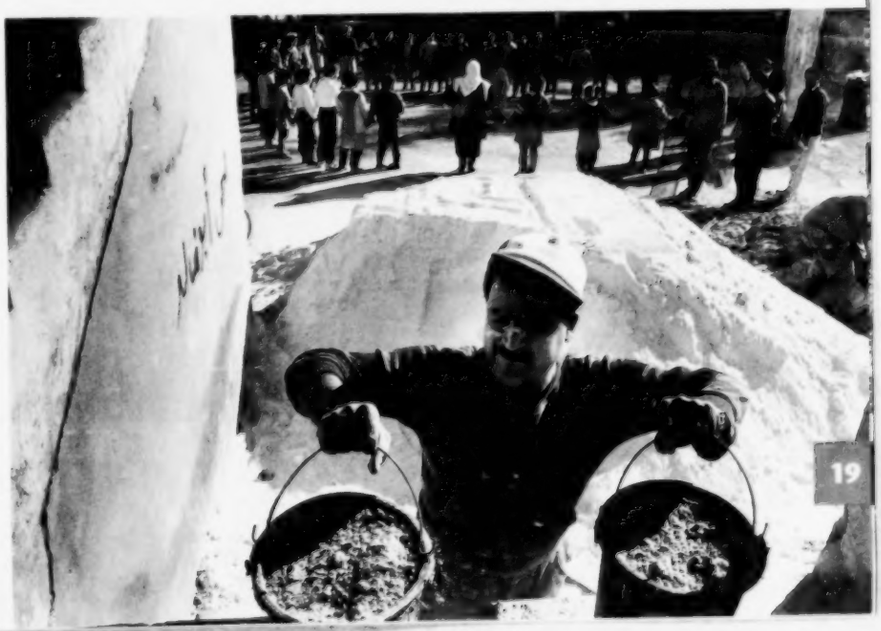
Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND)
Australian Care for Refugees (AUSTCARE)
Australian People for Health, Education (APHEDA)
Australia
Belgium
Canada
Denmark
Deutsche Stiftung Für UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe
European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO)
European Union
Finland
France
Germany
Ireland
Italy
Japan
Luxembourg
Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP)
The Netherlands
New Zealand
Norway
Saudi Arabia
Sweden
Switzerland
USA
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

Typical PIP projects

- aim to create visible changes on-the-ground, particularly in areas in which Palestinians are to assume responsibility
- build on existing UNRWA programmes and infrastructure
- answer clearly-identified needs of Palestinians
- are required under any political scenario
- are to be implemented in the short- to medium-term (within two years)

The new Gaza General Hospital being built under PIP by the European Union and UNRWA
UNRWA photo: Munir Nasr

A PIP project in action: Palestinian workman upgrading UNRWA's Shu'fat Preparatory Girls School in the West Bank. *UNRWA photo: Rula Halawani*



Cleaning up **Gaza**

When donors contribute to UNRWA's special environmental health programme in the Gaza Strip, they not only help eliminate health hazards and provide better living conditions for thousands of refugees, they are also creating jobs in an area of severe unemployment.

Chief of the special programme in Gaza, James Wilson estimates that about half of the contractual cost of the environmental projects will be reflected in terms of the job salaries of outside contractors. "The work is relatively short-term. But we are talking about quite a substantial increase in jobs in the construction industry," he said. New sewerage and drainage schemes in and around the Gaza refugee camps will require hundreds of kilometres of concrete pipelines - which could be manufactured locally if there were to be investment in new enterprises.

"Contamination of the environment is severe, constituting a major threat to the health of the population, to environmental resources, and to future development."

"Improvement of the environment constitutes one of the most urgent needs of the Gaza Strip."

UNRWA has already created opportunities for some Palestinians, simply by establishing its Agency-wide environmental health programme. It started two years ago with just four staff. Now, in Gaza alone, a team of some 15 people, almost all of them Palestinians, are using up-to-date technology for design, planning, site and programme management. "The office gives them experience they couldn't get anywhere else," said Wilson, "The staff are totally dedicated. They have a tremendous amount of pride in their work because they really feel as if they're doing it for themselves in the wider terms of their community."

Palestine refugees living in Beach camp, Gaza, are already feeling the benefits of the team's work. A low-lying area of the camp was spared its usual flooding during winter rain, thanks to surface water culverts installed as part of a comprehensive sewerage and drainage project. Refugees who expected to find themselves knee-deep in muddy water, were amazed to find their shelters stayed dry. "We did it by the skin of our teeth and our staff and the contractors really worked against the clock. When the rains did come, we had the maximum effect - it didn't flood," said Wilson.

Meanwhile, aided by mostly Italian and some German and Swiss funding, the team is proceeding with the task of providing full-scale sewerage and water drainage for every shelter in the camp. The current system constitutes a major health hazard. Open sewers run through the camp, feeding into an effluent pipe which dumps raw sewage into the Mediterranean.

UNRWA is helping to improve on this. Some 2,000 metres of sewage pipes have been laid. A coastal gravity line and protecting wall have been built and road improvements carried out. One pumping station is nearing completion and work is already underway on upgrading two others. A major job to come - costing US $800,000 and still only partially funded - is the refurbishment of the sewage treatment plant and effluent pumping station. Only when all the individual elements of the scheme are ready, can pipes from the nearby municipality and from Beach camp shelters be linked in. "It's like a giant jigsaw, with each piece representing a different project and each project interlinking with its neighbour," said Wilson.

Improvements for Gaza are in sight: work goes ahead on a PIP environmental project.
UNRWA-photo: Munir Nasr

Sewerage and drainage projects for camps are being designed so that they take in the adjoining municipalities. In addition to the Beach camp scheme, which will benefit some 60,000 camp residents at an eventual cost of over $35 million, the programme envisages similar sewerage and drainage projects for Gaza's middle camps - Maghazi, Bureij and Nuseirat - (at an initial cost of US $ 33 million plus another $22 million by the year 2010), for Deir el-Balah (US $18 million and later $8 million), and storm drainage in Jabalia (US $34 million in four phases). A solid wastes project for Beach camp costing US $600,000 has been largely completed. Some consultancy work has been completed and coordination with local institutions is going ahead on support for the solid waste sector in Gaza as a whole (US $3.1 million). The European Union is to carry out the $17.1 million first phase of a sewerage and drainage project for Rafah for which the Agency produced the feasibility study and overall project design.

"conditions in the camps simply mirror often worse conditions which exist outside them."

Feasibility studies and much of the detailed design have been completed on all these projects but work cannot go ahead until funding has been secured. Donors who support the not-so-glamorous sewerage and drainage projects know that their contributions are going to a good cause. Wilson said, "Improvement of the environment constitutes one of the most urgent needs of the Gaza Strip. Contamination of the environment is severe, constituting a major threat to the health of the population, to environmental resources, and to future development. Conditions in the camps simply mirror often worse conditions which exist outside them." UNRWA's projects are helping both to remedy this and to improve job prospects for Palestinians.

Palestinians preparing to lay a pipeline for a Gaza sewerage and drainage scheme.
UNRWA photo: Munir Nasr

Jabalia camp: Upgrading refuse collection points is one of UNRWA's priorities.
UNRWA photo: Munir Nasr

UNRWA: prospects for the future

This article, examining the Middle East peace process and its implications for Palestine refugees and for UNRWA, has been written for Palestine Refugees Today *by Mr. Yves Besson, formerly a Director of UNRWA Operations in the West Bank and currently Special Adviser to UNRWA's Commissioner-General. Mr. Besson, who represents the Agency in the Multilateral Working Groups on Refugees and Regional Economic Development, is Professor of International Relations at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland.*

Projecting the future is, by definition, always more hazardous than making an historical appraisal. How does one analyze what is possible or determine what is probable on the basis of discernible trends in the present, especially on an issue such as the Palestinian exodus?

The Agency ...is affected by the new dynamics created

The Palestinian exodus of 1948-49 is a very specific case - so specific that it was recognized as such by the international community which created UNRWA in 1950 in order to better emphasize this point. Precisely because of its particular nature, it is also at the core of what has become known for more than half a century as the Middle East question. The refugees of Palestine constitute a unique case in that, while - like other refugees elsewhere in the world - they have not been able to return to their home, even their eventual return had been, with the passing of time, considered more and more impossible. The exile and the return of the Palestinians and the Jews have hitherto been considered as mutually exclusive.

This is a decisive, radically new development

The first element of prospective analysis which we can identify today in the new situation created by the peace process, is that this mutual exclusion is no longer viewed by the parties concerned as an absolute and insurmountable obstacle. In effect, in the Declaration of Principles signed in Washington in September 1993, the Israelis and the Palestinians have acknowledged their reciprocal and fundamental interests in the region.

Now, with the active support of the international community in the bilateral and multilateral tracks of the peace process, the question of the refugees and of all those who cannot return to their homes, despite the legitimacy of their claims, is being examined and should be negotiated within the framework of mutual acceptance of reciprocal legitimacy. This is a decisive, radically new development which opens up a whole range of possible solutions which should be negotiated and defined by the parties involved in the peace process. This new element of reciprocal recognition and acceptance has entered into international law through the Madrid and Oslo negotiations, on a par with the legal framework established at the United Nations since 1950 by the international community.

It will, therefore, be incumbent upon all the parties to the Madrid process to seek solutions which could reconcile the progress made by the regional parties with the legal framework created, little by little, at the United Nations since 1950. The previous obstacle of reciprocal recognition of interests has been set aside; but, in practice, everything still remains to be done.

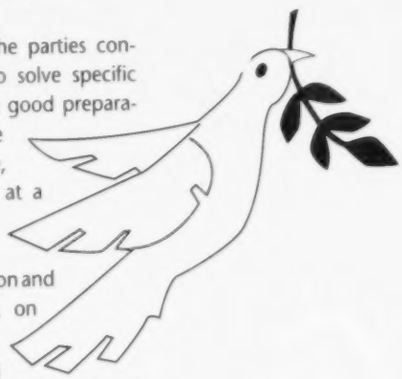
For its part, UNRWA, which from the very beginning has had to work on behalf of the Palestine refugees on the basis of the old parameter of the mutual exclusion of the parties involved, is also affected by this development. While the Agency is not involved in the search for solutions, it is affected by the new dynamics created, particularly since the signing of the Declaration of Principles. Admittedly, according to the Declaration of Principles, the issue of the refugees will only be addressed during the third year of the interim period, starting from 5 May 1996. However, both on the multilateral and bilateral tracks, the attitudes of the parties concerned are already evolving and their negotiating positions are being refined and shaped, be it through agreements, such as the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty, or through preliminary debates such as those taking place within the Multilateral Working Group on Refugees or within more technical or more discreet fora.

The more these preparations, studies and debates multiply and take shape, the more UNRWA appears to possess resources and information which are potentially useful to the search for and the formulation of solutions. Even if the Agency is not a party to the current or future negotiations, it is - by virtue of the information accumulated during nearly fifty years of operations - at the confluence of all the queries and all the technical issues, the answers to which will contribute to formulating future solutions.

It is important that UNRWA should ... preserve its capacity for impartial humanitarian action

From the starting-point of this first element, defined above, the bilateral and multilateral peace process on the issue of the refugees has evolved initially on a very pragmatic basis. Some may have found this regrettable, arguing that such a development, over the past three years, has been achieved at the cost of neglecting some basic political and legal principles adopted and recognized by the international community. However, it should be noted that such an approach, favouring, for obvious diplomatic reasons, the human aspects of the problem at the outset, does in no way prejudice the political and legal aspects to be addressed later.

Moreover, making the parties concerned work together to solve specific human problems can be good preparation for examining more political and, therefore, more difficult questions at a later date. In focusing, for instance, on the fields of refugees' education and health and, particularly, on family reunion, the Multilateral Working Group on Refugees helps to establish and further develop the definition of the framework within which, from 1996 onwards, the parties concerned will have to seek political and legal solutions to the Palestine refugee question.



In the establishment of the framework within which the parties concerned can start negotiating in a year's time, UNRWA's mandate and resources are clearly implicated. The international community, which created UNRWA as an instrument for action in support of the needs of the Palestine refugees, will have to decide on the changes to be made to that action in agreement with the parties concerned. The instrument that is UNRWA and the reservoir of accumulated information it represents, should become neither a pawn in future negotiations nor a means of political action to be appropriated by one or the other party.

It is important that UNRWA should, until its dissolution, preserve its capacity for impartial humanitarian action and development of Palestinian human resources which it has managed to safeguard throughout the many conflicts through which the Middle East has lived during the past fifty years. For this reason, seen against the perspective of the coming five years, the best contribution that the Agency could make to the peace process is to maintain the stability of its operations and the preparation of the physical and human heritage to pass on to the entire Palestinian community.

READERS' LETTERS

If you would like to express your views on *Palestine Refugees Today* or on topics referred to in this or previous issues of the magazine, please write to us at:

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Newly displaced refugees on the road near Suf refugee camp in Jordan after the 1967 war.
UNRWA photo

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